

**SENATE AND HOUSE  
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

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**February 21, 2019**

**Thursday**

**No. 5**

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**Address by**

**The Honorable Dan Sullivan**

**United States Senator**

**Before a Joint Session**

**of the**

**First Session of the**

**Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature**

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**February 21, 2019**

**Juneau, Alaska**



**The following was submitted for publication:**

**I. Introduction**

President Giessel. Speaker Edgmon. Members of the House and Senate from the Great State of Alaska, thank you for inviting me to speak to you. Thanks also to each member of the Legislature and your staff for your service to our state.

It's great to be home, back in this historic chamber.

Much of my leadership team is here in the gallery today. Erik Elam, my legislative director, my senior advisor Amanda Coyne, Renee Reeve my state director. Dana Herndon is helping me here in Juneau. My chief of staff Larry Burton and Mike Anderson, one of the few people who stands tall enough to look Gov. Dunleavy in the eye, both are in the building probably pacing.

And of course, also here, not only a key member of my leadership team, but the most important person in my world, the love of my life—my wife, Julie.

I'd also like to note who is not in the chamber today—my friend, Senator John Coghill—who is attending the funeral of his legendary father, Jack.

Jack Coghill was a model for us all. He was a veteran, a patriot, a Lt. Governor, a scrappy, old school entrepreneur who believed, with all his heart, in the ability of Alaskans to persevere and to thrive as long as we could develop our resources.

He was also one of our state's founding fathers, and a father to one of the great members of this body. He will be missed, but his legend lives on through his son.

Let's give the Coghills a hand.

I always view my speech to the Alaska Legislature as my most important speech of the year. Why?

For one thing, it gives me a chance to greet old friends and meet new ones—all of us united in a common cause: to do what's best for our state.

There's a tremendous freshman class of legislators here in front of me. Can you all rise so we can give you a hand? Thank you for running for office. Thanks for entering the arena. By the way, I'm still in my freshman term too!

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This speech also provides me a platform to discuss with so many of our elected leaders the opportunities and challenges we face, particularly from the federal perspective.

My first two addresses, I'll admit I was a bit worked up, lamenting the Obama administration's near constant actions to delay and lock up vital economic opportunities for our citizens.

My next two addresses have been more optimistic, given the accomplishments the Congress and the new administration have achieved that have focused on helping, not undermining, Alaska's economy.

Looking ahead, we have another shift in power in Washington, with a new House majority and a new Speaker.

Many of the new members in the House don't know much about Alaska: our size, our unique challenges, our unique cultures, and our wonderful people.

And these new House members haven't had to grapple with Don Young...yet!

But it's not just the new members in the House and the Senate. In my four years in D.C., I've come to understand that one of my most important jobs is educating my colleagues in the Congress, on both sides of the aisle, about our great state. This is not a new challenge, however.

In 1919, Alaska Territorial Governor Thomas Riggs spoke about the lack of knowledge about our state by most people in the country and, in particular, in Washington, D.C.

"To them," Governor Riggs said, "Alaska is a country peopled by desperados."

One hundred years later, there remains an element of truth to Governor Riggs' statement, though I'd prefer hard-working patriots to desperados.

## **II. State of the Union**

So where are we with the new Congress? We got through the partial government shutdown – not a great start – and moved right in to the President's State of the Union address. The State of the Union is a uniquely American event, and one that every year, I try to bring an Alaskan to witness.

This year, I brought Doug Tansy, from Fairbanks. Doug is a respected Alaska Native labor leader, and an advocate for hard-working Alaska families.

President Trump’s speech highlighted one area that I’m particularly focused on: the economy.

Because of policies, like cutting taxes on middle-class families and small businesses, getting rid of job-killing regulations, and unleashing the promise of American energy production, the U.S. economy in the Lower 48 is firing on all cylinders with very strong growth. The unemployment rate is at a 50-year low. Wages are finally rising after 20 years of being flat.

As we all know, good jobs and robust economies are essential foundations for strong communities and strong families. Jobs create wealth and dignity and self-worth, and a sense of purpose and pride that comes with earned success. The best social program always will be a good-paying job.

Senator Cathy Giessel has done important work highlighting how resource development in our state correlates not only to good jobs, but higher life expectancy. Few measures of success are more important than that—living longer.

During the State of the Union address, I’ll admit to feeling some frustration that while the rest of the country is booming, we are not—not yet, at least.

And I know that these are tense times for you and for our state as we’re grappling with shrinking budgets. But I’m optimistic that by continuing to enact good policies at the federal level and bringing investment dollars home to Alaska, the economic dynamism and job growth of the Lower 48 will hopefully be coming our way soon. Why?

### **III. Optimism**

#### **A. Resource Development**

First, resource development.

America is now the number one producer of oil and gas and renewables in the world. As former Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke repeatedly said, “America’s energy dominance”—which we are now witnessing—must run through Alaska. And that is beginning to happen.

The North Slope energy renaissance is real, and our state’s long recession looks as if it has ended at the drill bit.

The number of exploration and production rigs working on the North Slope should reach its highest level in over two decades this winter. And, for the first time in four years, oil field employment is rising.

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The state also just had one of its strongest North Slope lease sales in recent history.

The federal government, with leaders like Assistant Secretary of the Interior Joe Balash, is efficiently permitting both state and federal developments, like those in the NPR-A and the off-shore Liberty project.

And then there's ANWR. After my speech here two years ago, Speaker Edgmon presented me with a resolution from all of you—the Alaska Legislature—that said, in essence, at long last, go get it done. Open the 1002 Area of ANWR for the benefit of Alaska and America.

Well, we did it. All of us. A forty-year team effort—Democrats and Republicans—that so many in this room supported and played an important role in.

Now, we have to stand united in the next step—a successful ANWR lease sale that we hope will occur this year. There are many powerful Outside special interests that are already working to sabotage the lease sale. So, here's my request to all of you: in your meetings with American energy executives, strongly encourage them to bid in this upcoming ANWR lease sale, for our sake and that of our country!

### **B. Military**

Just like energy in America, the U.S. military is also making a comeback after the previous administration slashed the Pentagon's budget by 25 percent. Nowhere has this rebuilding of our military been more important and impressive than in our state.

In just the past three and a half years, Senator Murkowski, Congressman Young and I have secured over \$1.3 billion for military construction in Alaska—including the F-35s to Eielson and a new missile field at Fort Greely.

This is good for America's national security, and it's good for Alaskan workers and families —hundreds, if not thousands, of good-paying jobs are connected to this construction.

As chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee in charge of readiness and military construction, I am confident that this Alaska build-up will continue, in part because we sell ourselves so well.

This past summer, I hosted the secretaries of the Air Force, the Navy, the Army, as well as the Commandant of the Coast Guard (twice), and Secretary of Defense Mattis in different places throughout our state. Being on the ground in the most strategic place in the world makes an impression. So too does having a beer at the Board of Trade in Nome, which I did with the Secretary of the Navy, which might be the reason he recently announced the need for a strategic Arctic port in Western Alaska!

### **C. Coast Guard**

Importantly, this military build-up in Alaska extends to the Coast Guard. The brave men and women of our Coast Guard risk their lives every day for all of us in Alaska. How about a round of applause for these unsung heroes?

As chairman of the subcommittee in charge of the Coast Guard, we are undertaking a major re-capitalization of the Coast Guard fleet. This included more ships and aircraft to Alaska.

Last April, the Commandant of the Coast Guard announced its new force laydown for Alaska: four more fast response cutters are being built and slated for Alaska. The FRCs will be home-ported in Kodiak—two of them—one in Seward, one in Sitka, and two previously commissioned FRCs will remain stationed in Ketchikan. Additionally, Petersburg and Juneau will be receiving additional large Coast Guard patrol boats.

Just last week, the Congress appropriated \$53 million for the infrastructure to support these new vessels, giving many of our Southeast communities significant investments in infrastructure and local housing.

Further, we are at long last finally making real progress on icebreakers. In this year's defense bill, I secured a provision that authorized the scheduled purchase of six Polar-class icebreakers and, just this past week, Senator Murkowski played a key role in the appropriation of close to \$700 million for the building of what will be the first of many of these polar security cutters.

You can be sure that we're not done pushing to get more Coast Guard assets to Alaska. In fact, we're just beginning.

### **D. Fishing**

Of course, it's not only energy resources and the military that drive our economy. It's tourism, it's federal infrastructure dollars, it's our fisheries. In all of these areas, the trend lines point to a stronger Alaska economy.

Our state has the most sustainable and abundant fisheries in the world, supporting tens of thousands of jobs.

We've had several recent successes in increasing market opportunities for our world-class wild products.

For example, we were able to include a provision in the most recent Farm Bill that mandates that only domestically landed and processed fish be included in the National School Lunch program. Unbelievably, there was a loophole in the previous program that allowed Russian-caught pollock, injected in China with phosphates, to be sent back to the United States for purchase in the U.S. School Lunch Program.

Not only was this bad for Alaska's fishing industry, the chemical-laden, twice frozen fish that was served to our students just didn't taste good. It literally turned a generation of kids in America off of seafood. Not anymore. We closed the loophole, and American kids will now be eating the best fish on the planet—wild caught Alaskan.

#### **E. Federal Government Committed to Our Success**

The final reason I'm optimistic about the direction of Alaska's economy is that we have an administration in D.C. that wants to help us. Say what you will about President Trump—like him, don't like him—from the very start, he and his administration have shown a commitment to Alaska's success—and I appreciate people who are good to our people.

Early in President Trump's term, he invited Senator Murkowski and me over for a meeting in the Oval Office. It was all about Alaska. We brought maps, charts, lots of graphs. Spread over his desk.

With Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke in the room, we talked about Alaska's vast resources and the problems that we had with the previous administration in developing those resources—NPR-A, OCS, ANWR, Tongass, the military, and access to federal lands. We talked about Alaska's economic potential, but we also talked about our veterans. We talked about the King Cove Road, and we even talked about whaling on the North Slope.

On almost every one of these issues, the Trump administration has delivered. They've had help with wonderful Alaskans like Joe Balash, Tara Sweeney, Chris Oliver and Drue Pearce in senior administration positions, looking out for our interests.

The Trump administration even helped our incredible whaling captains.



During a meeting with high-level State Department officials, and our North Slope whalers, we received assurances that the administration was absolutely committed to helping during the International Whaling Commission meeting in Brazil late last year. Those officials, alongside a hearty crew of North Slope whalers, helped make sure that countries voted our way. And it worked. For the first time ever, the IWC voted to automatically renew our North Slope whalers' quotas. A huge victory.

Mayor Brower is in the gallery today and was in Brazil working the issue hard. Can we give him and the other North Slope whaling captains a hand?

#### **IV. Protect What You've Earned**

In the Marine Corps, we have a saying: Protect What You've Earned. When it comes to the new House majority in Washington, D.C., a lot of what I just discussed as important achievements for Alaska might come under attack.

Raising taxes on Americans, shutting down access to federal lands, like ANWR, the Alaska Native Vietnam Veterans allotments, the King Cove Road, slashing defense and Coast Guard funding, and even the so-called Green New Deal—these types of policies are now being discussed and introduced in the House.

Let me assure you, Congressman Young, Senator Murkowski and I will fight to protect what we've earned.

We will work hard to ensure these victories for Alaska are preserved in the new Congress.

#### **V. Areas of Cooperation**

But that doesn't mean there will not be areas of cooperation in the new Congress. In fact, I am confident we can build on bipartisan successes we've already had. Let me suggest a few areas.

##### **A. Healthcare**

First, healthcare, which I know is a major concern for Alaskans, particularly as budgets are being cut for public programs.

Healthcare costs are simply unsustainable. We need to decrease costs while preserving the elements that only America's healthcare system delivers.

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How have we worked to do this?

We funded the Children's Health Insurance Program, known as Denali Kidcare in Alaska—for 10 years. It's the longest reauthorization in the program's history.

We expanded funding for Community Health Centers—\$7.8 billion in funding this year. There are 170 community health center sites across our state, serving more than 113,000 Alaskans. We will continue to fund these vital centers.

The administration eased regulations on short-term insurance plans, allowing people to find a plan that is affordable and best fits their circumstances. The Alaska Chamber of Commerce is coalescing small businesses throughout the state to allow them to purchase insurance at lower rates.

Recently, the Congress passed and the president signed two bills that will bring transparency to drug pricing.

Looking ahead, you can expect to continue seeing significant bipartisan efforts to reduce healthcare costs, including on prescription drugs.

However, I will oppose any Medicare for all plan, which sounds good but would cost \$3 trillion a year and force upwards of 170 million Americans off of their private insurance into government-run healthcare.

We need to make changes, but there are components of America's health care system that are second to none—we have the best oncology, the best pediatric care, the best hospitals, and the best doctors and healthcare workers.

We cannot lose this by making the whole system run by the government.

### **B. Opioids**

Related to health, in the past few years I've also been very focused on combating the opioid and addiction crisis that's plagued so many of our communities in Alaska and across the country. My awakening on this issue began with a summit that I held in the Mat-Su in 2016, which was attended by more than 400 Alaskans. The stories I heard there of heartbreak and trauma, and of hope, made me fully realize what a huge issue this is for all of us. More than 72,000 Americans died of overdoses last year.

Members of Congress have also woken up to this challenge and are working diligently to address it. In the past few years, we've passed significant legislation that will bring billions of dollars to the states—as well as significant funds for our rural communities and Native Health Organizations—to provide treatment and prevention and strengthen enforcement efforts.

I'm heartened to hear that it's beginning to have an effect in Alaska, and that opioid deaths are declining. But, as we all know, we still have much work to do.

### **C. Save Our Seas**

Two years ago, I teamed up with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democrat from Rhode Island, to try to do something about the ocean debris crisis, one that's particularly affecting Alaska.

He and I make an odd team. His state is very small, our state is very big, 490 times the size of his, I remind him frequently! He's very, very liberal. And well, I'm...not.

In October, I was proud to accompany Senator Whitehouse and my wife, Julie, to the White House for an Oval Office signing ceremony of the Save our Seas (SOS) Act, a bill to help clean up our oceans that he and I authored. With hundreds of thousands of tons of debris estimated to be floating on the ocean's surface, this matter is urgent and threatens the well-being of our citizens, coastal communities—and for Alaskans—the sustainability of our world-class fisheries.

It was the first time Sheldon had met the president. I had worked hard to get Senator Whitehouse invited to the White House for the signing ceremony. I asked Sheldon if he was going to behave. He asked me if President Trump was going to behave.

I had to admit that I had no idea.

But everybody ended up getting along great at the signing, which CNN and Fox News carried live.

In this new Congress, I'm working with Senator Whitehouse and other colleagues on both sides of the aisle on Save Our Seas 2.0, which would build even more international momentum behind combating the global scourge of marine debris.

This is an environmental issue that can be solved: five countries in Asia, 10 rivers, account for approximately 75 percent of ocean plastics. And there is full alignment from all stake-holder groups—Democrats, Republicans, the Trump administration, environment groups, and industry.

A group of industries have gotten together a coalition to tackle this issue, pledging \$1.5 billion.

We can solve this problem. We'll be introducing Save Our Seas 2.0 soon.

#### **D. Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence**

One final area of bipartisan cooperation that I will be focusing on in the new Congress involves a difficult issue to talk about—the problem of sexual assault and domestic violence in Alaska.

Let me begin this topic with a story of my own. Almost ten years ago when I was your Attorney General, I was the lead of what was then called the Rural Subcabinet, and I traveled to a number of communities with other cabinet members. In one of the meetings I had early on, I was with a superintendent in a community where he told me his best student—his best student—had called in and she was unable to take a test that morning and the reason that was the case is because she had been sexually assaulted the night before.

I knew that sexual abuse was a huge problem in our state. But there was something about that particular story that broke my heart and steeled my resolve to work to do all I could to stop it.

Soon, the *Choose Respect Initiative* was born—and soon, posters were being taped to school walls, marches were being held, people began to talk more openly about the issue, a whole host of lawyers began providing their services to victims and survivors, free of charge.

Unfortunately, that campaign has fallen by the wayside, and I urge everybody in this body to bring it back.

We have many social problems in our state. But I count domestic violence and, particularly, sexual abuse to be the most pernicious.

Women make up roughly half of our state, and the statistics show that more than half of them have been abused. That's a quarter of our state.

These are our sisters and mothers, our spouses, our aunts, and our daughters. These are our neighbors and our friends. These are members of our staff. And maybe some of the members of this body.

Like the opioid epidemic, this is an issue that affects all of us—all races, all income levels, all ages, in all corners of our state. It saps our creativity and our energy. It leaves deep, permanent scars across generations.

We have such tremendous potential as a state. But we simply will not realize it if we don't stop this. If men don't stop this.

And this problem extends throughout our nation.

So, in the new Congress, we intend to take key elements of *Choose Respect* to the national level.

Last year, I spoke about a bill that I authored, the POWER Act—which will provide more free legal services to victims and survivors throughout the country.

I'm proud to say that in September, the POWER Act was signed into law.

But we have more work to do. I've been working with my colleagues—again from both sides of the aisle—on a series of bills that we're calling the "Choose Respect Initiative" which will focus on spreading awareness, improving the criminal justice system for victims, and dramatically increasing legal representation.

The initiative includes a national advertising campaign, an innovative program to issue protective orders, and a right to counsel for victims. Think of this fact. If you're a perpetrator—a rapist, a stalker—and you're charged. Guess what? You get a lawyer, paid for by the government.

If you're a victim, you get nothing. We should change that. We want to get money to the states so that they can provide legal representation to these victims. It's only fair that survivors have the same right to legal counsel as perpetrators and studies show that the best way for a survivor to break out of the cycle of violence is to get her a lawyer.

Again, working together—people of both parties, the federal government, the states, communities—we can tackle this issue.

**VI. Conclusion**

Let me conclude by talking about another reason I remain optimistic about our future.

We know that Alaskans are a self-sufficient, generous people.

We see it all the time, most recently in the aftermath of the earthquake, where everyone pitched in. That was the most dramatic example we've had for a while—but every day, neighbors all across the state—your constituents—are spending time and energy and effort helping others, making their communities and our state strong.

Nearly every week we're in session, I go to the Senate floor to highlight one of these Alaskans. I call them our "Alaskans of the Week," and it's one of the ways that I try to educate Americans about Alaska.

It's also one of the best things I do all week. The D.C. reporters and the Senate pages actually kind of love it. When I'm in the halls, they often ask me, "Senator, who's the Alaskan of the Week?"

So, let me tell you about them. They're as old as 100 and as young as 8. They come from the far North and right here in Southeast. They live surrounded by our beautiful tundra, by the churning seas, by mountains, by rainforests.

They are librarians, artists, former governors, reporters, healthcare workers, whalers, counselors, pastors, lawyers, athletes, students, teachers, nearly every profession imaginable. Some of them have retired. Some of them aren't even of working age.

They reflect our state in all of its wonderful diversity. But they all have one thing in common: They all use whatever skills they have to help others.

These people live in your districts and I can imagine you're so proud of them. Let me give you just a few examples of people that live in your districts that I have highlighted on the Senate floor.

Jeanne Follett from Moose Pass spends hours nearly every day cleaning up trash from the side of the Seward and Sterling Highways. She estimates that she covers around 50 miles of highway every season. Jeanne is in your district Senator Micciche and Rep. Carpenter.

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Joyce McCombs, in Delta Junction, has spent nearly 32 years keeping the library there going, and keeping it one of the best libraries in the state. It's a "community living room," Joyce calls it—a much-needed place for people to get out of the cold and be with each other. Senator Shower and Representative Rauscher, she's one of yours.

AlexAnna Salmon, of Igiugig, who graduated cum laude from Dartmouth College, came back to her home to better her community and to work on sustainable energy and food projects. She's in your district Senator Hoffman and Speaker Edgmon.

Senator Bert Stedman and Rep. Ortiz, what an honor you and I have to represent "Sol" Atkinson, of Metlakatla. Sol served as one of the first ever U.S. Navy SEALs, three tours in Vietnam, and went on to train 48 astronauts, including Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Jim Lovell, just to name a few. All of this and yet he still came home and spent his years helping veterans get the benefits they had earned.

I could go on. All across the state, our Alaskans of the Week are helping people find a pet to love, making meals for the sick, starting and contributing to nonprofits, writing beautiful prose, establishing iconic businesses, working their whole lives to do what's right by their state, their country, and their communities.

They are constant reminders that no matter how heated the conversations may get in this building, and in D.C., we're all in this together.

We work for them, with their consent, so that they can work for all of us. Sometimes I think it's easy to forget that government doesn't control everything. It doesn't control empathy. It doesn't control kindness and generosity. That's what people do. That's their job.

And if we do our job well—if we get along where we can, fight for what we believe in, compromise when necessary—they will be free to do their jobs well too.

They are the real reason for optimism.

Thank you for letting me address you. God Bless Alaska.

**Please report corrections to the Senate Secretary's office.**